

◀ The city-states of Sparta (above) and Athens (below) were bitter rivals.

Life in Two City-States: Athens and Sparta

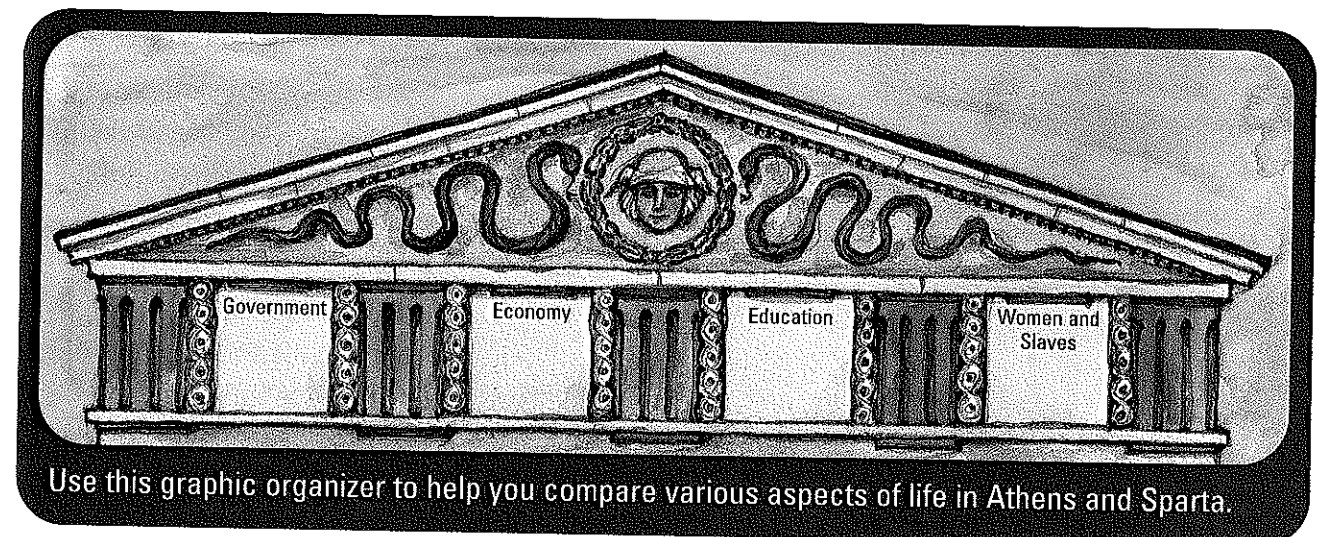
27.1 Introduction

In Chapter 26, you learned that ancient Greece was a collection of city-states, each with its own government. In this chapter, you will learn about two of the most important Greek city-states, Athens and Sparta. They not only had different forms of government, but very different ways of life.

Athens was a walled city near the sea. Nearby, ships came and went from a busy port. Inside the city walls, master potters and sculptors labored in workshops. Wealthy people and their slaves strolled through the marketplace. Often the city's citizens (free men) gathered to loudly debate the issues of the day.

Sparta was located in a farming area on a plain. No walls surrounded the city. Its buildings were simple and plain compared to those of Athens. Even the clothing of the people in the streets was drab. Columns of soldiers tramped through the streets, with fierce expressions behind their bronze helmets.

Even a casual visitor could see that Athens and Sparta were very different. Let's take a closer look at the way people lived in these two city-states. We'll examine each city's **government**, **economy**, **education**, and treatment of women and slaves.



Peloponnesus the peninsula forming the southern part of the mainland of Greece

27.2 Comparing Two City-States

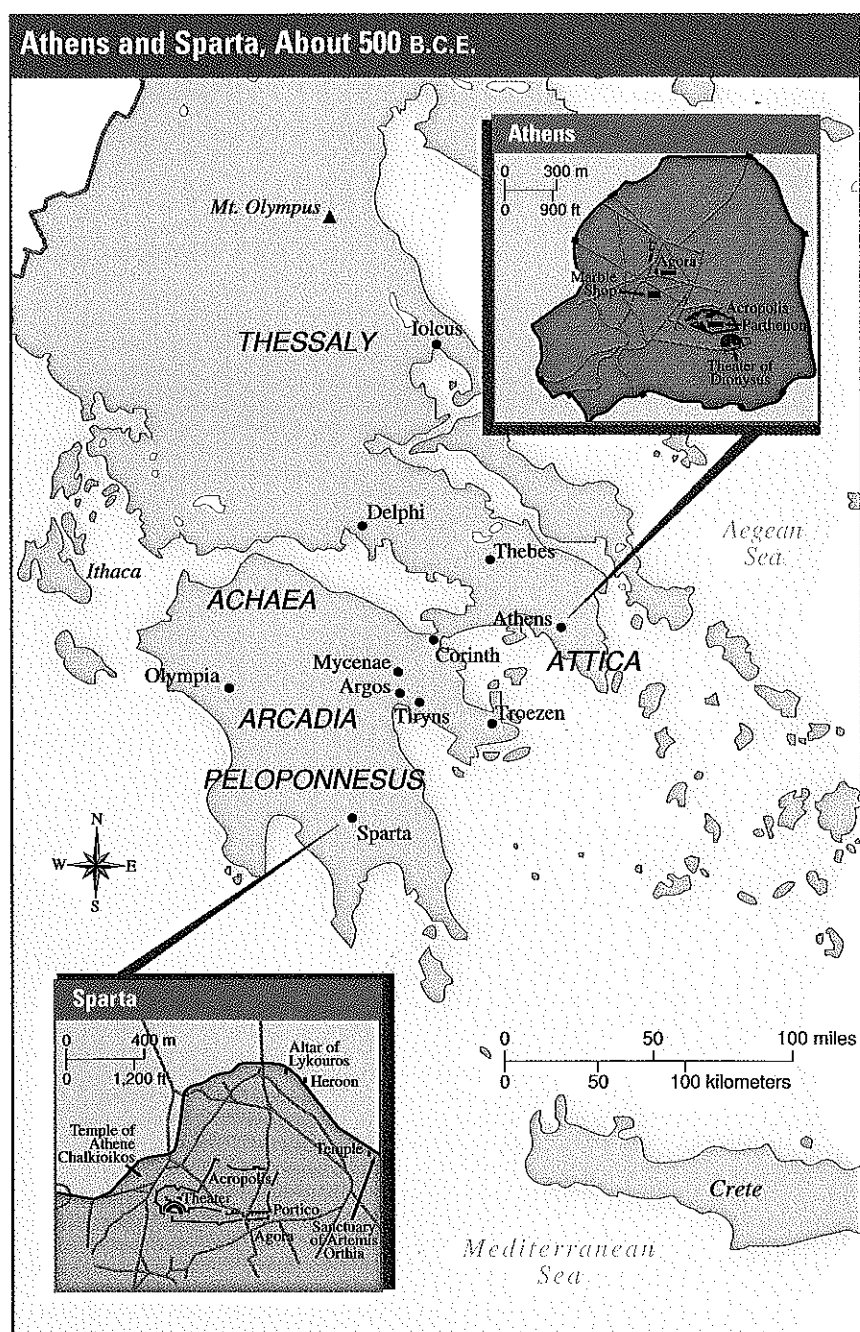
Athens and Sparta were both Greek cities, and they were only about 150 miles apart. Yet they were as different as they could be. Why?

Part of the answer is geography. Athens is in central Greece, only four miles from the Aegean Sea. Its location encouraged Athenians to look outward toward the world beyond the city. Athenians liked to travel. They were eager to spread their own ideas and to learn from others. They encouraged artists from other parts of Greece to come and share their knowledge of art

and architecture. Athens developed strong relationships with other city-states, and it grew large and powerful through trade. A great fleet made it the leading naval power in Greece.

In contrast, Sparta was more isolated. It was located on a plain between the mountains and the sea in the part of Greece known as the **Peloponnesus**. Spartans were suspicious of outsiders and their ideas. They grew much of what they needed in the fertile soil around Sparta. What they couldn't grow, they often took from their neighbors through the power of their armies. While Athenians boasted of their art and culture, Spartans valued strength and simplicity. They taught their sons and daughters to fight, and they produced soldiers rather than artists and thinkers.

For most of their histories, the two city-states were bitter rivals. As you will see, their differences were reflected in every part of life.



27.3 Athenian Government

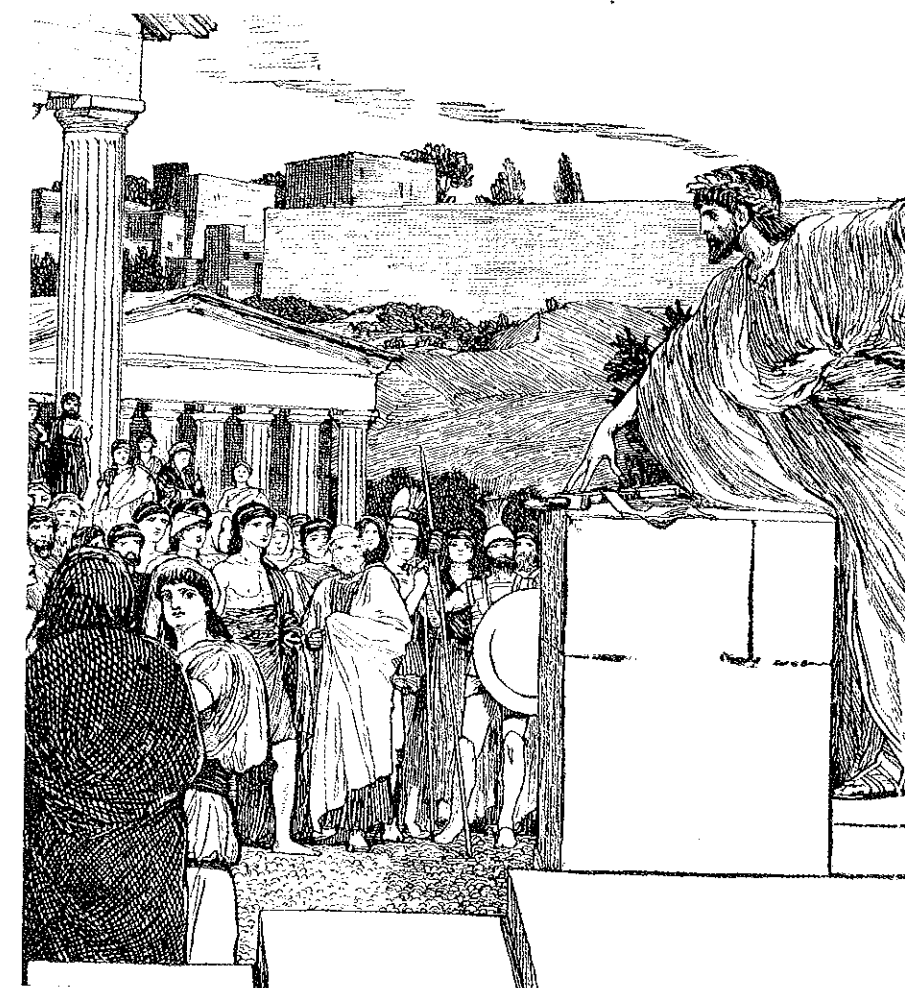
As you learned in the last chapter, Athens became a democracy around 500 B.C.E. But unlike modern democracies, Athens allowed only free men to be citizens. All men over the age of 18 who were born in Athens were Athenian citizens. Women and slaves were not citizens.

Every citizen could take part in the city's government. A group called the Council of 500 met every day. Each year, the names of all citizens 30 years of age or older were collected, and 500 of those names were chosen. The council ran the day-to-day business of government and suggested new laws.

Proposed laws had to be approved by a much larger group, the Assembly. The Assembly met on a hill every 10 days. At least 6,000 citizens had to be present for a meeting to take place. If not enough people showed up, slaves would round up more citizens with ropes dipped in red paint. Men were embarrassed to appear at the meeting with their clothes stained with red marks.

The Assembly debated and voted on laws proposed by the council. Every citizen had the right to speak at Assembly meetings. Some speakers were more skilled than others. Some spoke longer than others. Sometimes a water clock was used to time the speaker. One cup of water was set above another. The first cup had a small hole drilled into the bottom. The speaker could talk only until all the water ran out of the top cup and into the bottom cup.

Most Athenian men enjoyed taking part in the city's democracy. They liked to gather and debate the issues. They were proud of their freedom as Athenian citizens.



Demosthenes, an Athenian leader, speaks to the Assembly.

agora a marketplace in ancient Greece

Athenians shopped for food and household goods in the agora. On this vase, a shopper is shown inspecting a piece of pottery.



27.4 Athenian Economy

An important part of life in any community is its economy. An *economy* is the way a community or region organizes the manufacture and exchange of money, food, products, and services.

The Athenian economy was based on trade. The land around Athens did not provide enough food for all the city's people. But Athens was near the sea, and it had a good harbor. So Athenians traded with other city-states and some foreign lands to get the goods and natural resources they needed. They acquired wood from Italy and grain from Egypt. In exchange, Athenians traded honey, olive oil, silver, and beautifully painted pottery.

Athenians bought and sold goods at a huge marketplace called

the **agora**. There, merchants sold their goods from small stands. People bought lettuce, onions, olive oil, wine, and other foods. They could also buy household items like pottery, furniture, and clay oil lamps. Most Athenians made their clothes at home, but leather sandals and jewelry were popular items at the market. In addition, Athenians bought and sold slaves at the agora.

Like most city-states, Athens developed its own coins to make trade easier. Coins were made of such metals as gold, silver, and bronze. Athenians decorated the flat sides of their coins. One of their coins had an image of the goddess Athena on one side. The other side pictured Athena's favorite bird, the owl.



27.5 Education in Athens

Athenian democracy depended on having good citizens. Athenians believed that producing good citizens was the main purpose of education. Since only boys grew up to be citizens, boys and girls were educated quite differently.

Athenians believed that a good citizen had a sharp mind and a healthy body. So education meant physical training as well as book learning. Until age 6 or 7, boys were taught at home by their mothers or male slaves. From age 6 to 14, boys went to school. Teachers taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and literature. Books were rare and very expensive, so subjects were read out loud and the boys had to memorize everything. To help them learn, they used writing tablets. Coaches taught sports such as wrestling and gymnastics to strengthen students' muscles. Boys also studied music. They learned to sing and to play the lyre.

At 18, Athenian men began their military training. After their service, wealthy young men might study with private teachers. These teachers charged high fees for lessons in debate and public speaking that would help young men become political leaders.

Unlike boys, most girls did not learn to read or write. Girls grew up helping their mothers around the house. They were taught to cook, clean, spin thread, and weave cloth. Some also learned ancient secret songs and dances for religious festivals. Girls usually married around the age of 15. Those from wealthy families married men chosen by their fathers. Girls from poor families often had more choice.

Athenian boys learned poetry and music as well as reading and writing. The stringed instrument near the top of this ancient Greek painting is a lyre.



The women of Athens had their greatest influence in the home.

27.6 Women and Slaves in Athens

As you have already learned, only men were considered citizens in Athens. Women and slaves were not. As a result, they had far fewer rights than free men did.

Athenian women could not inherit or own much property. They could not vote or attend the Assembly. Most could not even choose their own husbands.

A few women had jobs. Some women sold goods in the market. A few very important women were **priestesses**. But most Athenian women had their greatest influence in the home. They spent their days managing the household and bringing up their children. An Athenian wife had separate rooms at home and never went out alone. She would spin, weave, and supervise the slaves. She educated her sons until they were 6 or 7 and ready for school. She taught her daughters until they were 15 and ready to be married.

There were many slaves in ancient Athens. Most people who weren't poor owned at least one slave. Some slaves were born into slavery. Others became slaves when they were captured in wars.

Slaves performed a wide variety of jobs in Athens, including tasks that required a great deal of skill. Some slaves ran households and tutored Athenian children. A number of slaves were trained as craftsmen. Others worked in farms or factories. Some slaves worked for the city as clerks.

The unluckiest slaves worked in the silver mines. They might work 10 hours a day in cramped tunnels 300 feet below the surface. They had little air to breathe and were often whipped if they stopped to rest.



Some Athenian slaves labored in silver mines.

27.7 Spartan Government

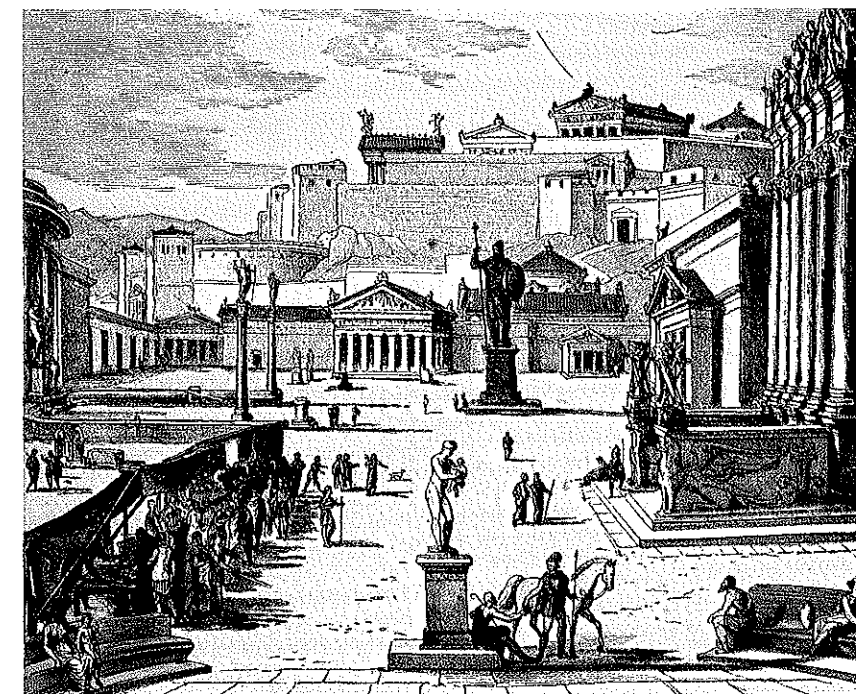
Sparta was different from Athens in almost every way, beginning with its government. While Athens was a democracy, Sparta was an oligarchy. As you learned in Chapter 26, in an oligarchy the ruling power is in the hands of a few people. Like Athens, Sparta had an assembly. But the important decisions were really made by a much smaller group called the Council of Elders.

The Council of Elders consisted of two kings and 28 other men. The two kings inherited their position and shared equal powers. The other 28 members of the council were elected by the Assembly.

To be elected to the Council of Elders, men had to be at least 60 years old and from a noble family. Some scholars believe that Assembly members shouted for the man they wanted most. The candidates who received the loudest support were elected. Once they were elected, they served for life.

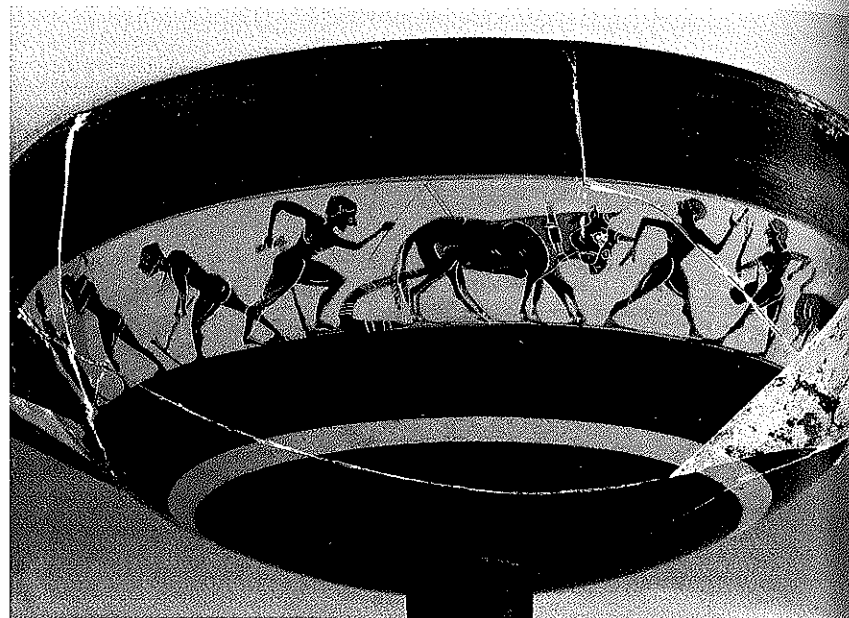
The Council of Elders held the real power in Sparta. It prepared laws for the Assembly to vote on, and it had the power to stop any laws passed by the Assembly that the council members didn't like.

The Assembly in Sparta was made up of male citizens. Because the Assembly was large, it met in a large outdoor area away from the center of the city. The Assembly had very little power. Unlike the Assembly in Athens, it did not debate issues. Members of the Assembly could only vote yes or no on laws suggested by the Council of Elders.



The agora in Sparta was a place where people could gather. Spartan men often debated government issues there.

Sparta's economy depended more on farming, as shown in this cup from ancient Greece, than on trade.



27.8 Spartan Economy

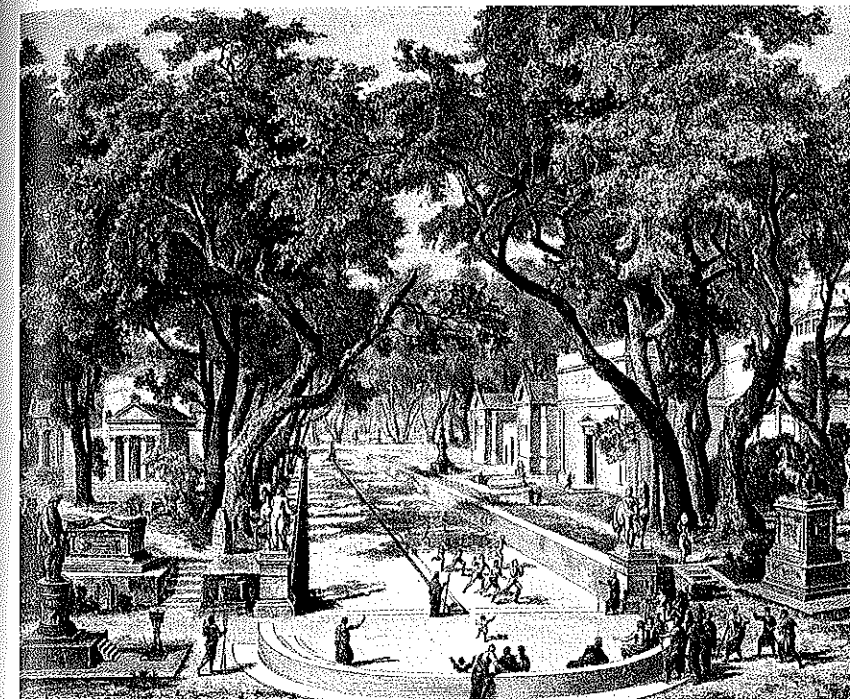
While the Athenian economy depended on trade, Sparta's economy relied on farming and on conquering other people. Sparta didn't have enough land to feed all its people, so Spartans took the land they needed from their neighbors. Because Spartan men spent their lives as warriors, Sparta used slaves and noncitizens to produce needed goods.

The Spartans turned the neighbors they conquered into slaves, called *helots*. The helots continued to live in their own villages, but they had to give much of the food they grew to the Spartan citizens.

The Spartans also made use of noncitizens, called *perioikoi*. Perioikoi were free men, not slaves. They might serve in the army when needed, but they could not take part in Sparta's government. The perioikoi made such necessary items as shoes, red cloaks for the soldiers, iron tools like knives and spears, and pottery. They also conducted some trade with other city-states for goods that Sparta could not provide for itself.

In general, though, Sparta discouraged trade. The Spartans feared that contact with other city-states would lead to new ideas and weaken their government. Trading with Sparta was also difficult because of its system of money. Sparta didn't have coins. Instead, it used heavy iron bars as money. Legend says that an ancient Spartan leader decided to use iron as money to make it hard to steal. A thief would need a wagon to carry enough iron bars to be valuable. As you can imagine, other city-states were not anxious to receive iron as payment for goods.

These iron rods were used as money in Sparta.



Boys in Sparta often exercised in outdoor areas.

27.9 Education in Sparta

In Sparta, the purpose of education was to produce men and women who could protect the city-state. If a baby did not appear healthy and strong, it might be left to die on a hillside.

Spartans valued discipline and strength. From the age of 7, all Spartan children were trained to fight. Even girls received some military training. They learned wrestling, boxing, footracing, and gymnastics. Spartan boys lived and trained in buildings called *barracks*. They were taught to read and write, but Spartans did not consider those skills as important.

What was important was to be a brave soldier. Spartan boys were taught to suffer any amount of physical pain without complaining. They marched without shoes. They were not fed well, and they were encouraged to steal food as long as they did not get caught. One Spartan legend tells of a boy who stole a fox because he was starving. When he saw his teacher coming, the boy quickly hid the fox under his cloak. Rather than confess, he let the fox bite his stomach.

At the age of 20 or so, Spartan men were given a difficult test of fitness, military ability, and leadership skills. If they passed, they became Spartan soldiers and full citizens. Even then, they continued to live in soldiers' barracks, where they ate, slept, and trained with their classmates. A man could not live at home with his wife and family until he was 30 years old. And his military service continued long after that.



Unlike women in Athens, Spartan women could speak with men in public.

27.10 Women and Slaves in Sparta

Spartan women lived the same simple life as Spartan men. They wore plain clothing with little decoration. They did not wear jewelry or use cosmetics or perfume. Like Spartan men, women were expected to be strong and healthy—and ready to fight. A woman was expected to look after her husband's property in times of war. She also had to guard it against invaders and revolts from slaves.

Spartan women had many rights that other Greek women did not have. They were free to speak with their husbands' friends. They could own and control their own property. They could even marry another man if their first husband had been away at war too long.

Spartan slaves, the helots, were people who had been conquered by the Spartans. There were many more helots than citizens in Sparta. The Spartans were afraid the helots would revolt, so they treated them very harshly.

The government sometimes declared war on the helots so that it could legally kill any slaves it thought might rebel. Once the Spartan government asked the helots to choose their best fighters. The Spartans said these men would be set free as thanks for fighting for Sparta. Two thousand helots were chosen. Immediately, the Spartans killed every one of them to eliminate any future helot leaders.

Despite this treatment, helots actually had some rights. They could marry whomever and whenever they wanted. They could pass their names on to their children. They could sell any extra crops they had after giving their master his share. If they saved enough money, they could even buy their freedom.



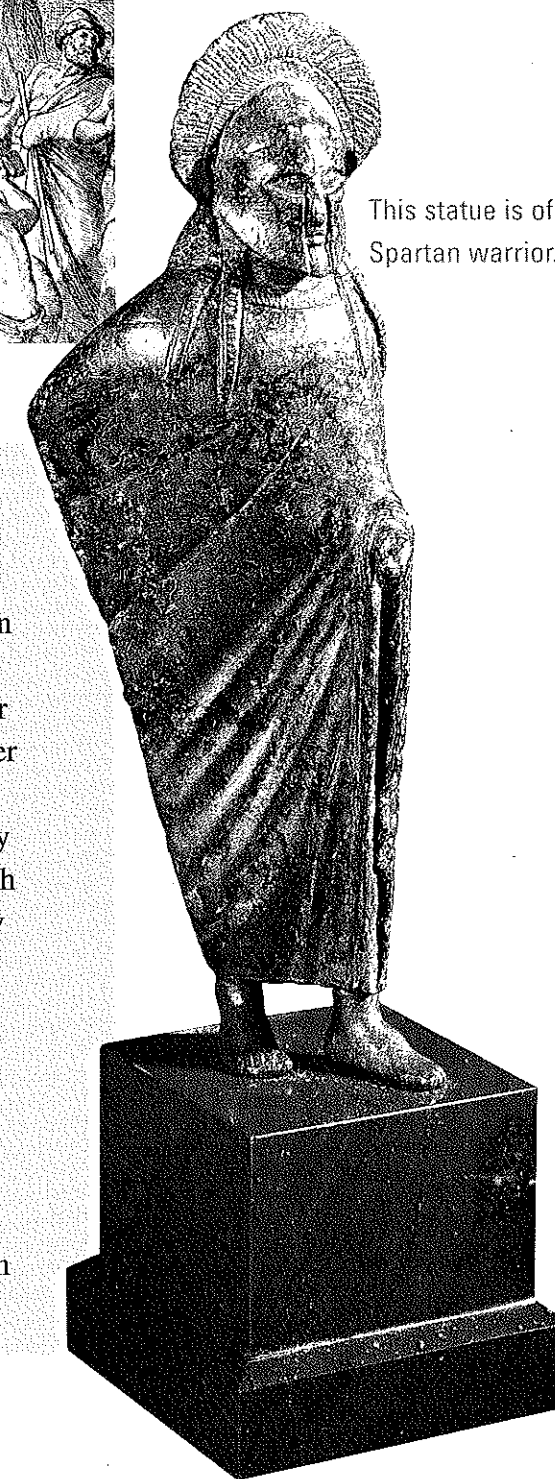
An architect shows the Athenian leader Pericles plans for the building of the Parthenon, a temple in Athens.

27.11 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned about Athens and Sparta, two very different city-states in ancient Greece. Athens was a democracy, though only free men could take part in its government. Its economy depended on trade. Boys were educated to be good citizens. Girls learned skills for managing the household. Women and slaves had far fewer rights than men had.

Sparta was more isolated than Athens. It was primarily a military state. Its government was an oligarchy in which a few men held most of the power. The Spartan economy depended on farming and conquest. Boys and girls alike were educated to protect the city-state. Spartan women had more rights than other Greek women. The city depended on slaves and other noncitizens to provide for many of its needs.

Athens and Sparta were bitter rivals. But in the next chapter, you'll see how they came together with other Greek city-states to fight a terrible threat to their freedom and independence.



This statue is of a Spartan warrior.